



# News Release

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## **West Nile virus update: Benton County red-tailed hawk is state's first bird to test positive this season**

**OLYMPIA** — An ailing red-tailed hawk captured in the Prosser area of Benton County tested positive for West Nile virus. This is the first bird to test positive in our state this year.

The bird was found ill last month in the Prosser area. It was sent to a rehabilitation center in Eastern Oregon where blood was drawn last week and sent to Oregon State University for testing. Along with this bird, the virus has been detected in 63 mosquito pools in Yakima and Benton counties this year. Last year 24 birds tested positive for West Nile virus.

“Testing for West Nile virus in mosquitoes, horses, and birds shows where the disease is active in our state,” said Liz Dykstra, public health entomologist for the state health department. “With the results we’re seeing this year, it’s clear the virus is very active in the middle of our state. It’s important that people take steps to prevent mosquito bites to avoid infection.”

West Nile virus is mainly a bird disease. Mosquitoes feed on infected birds and then can pass the virus to people, horses, and other animals. The Benton-Franklin Health District reported the test results as part of the state’s West Nile virus monitoring program. Bird testing for the virus began on July 1 — so far, 14 birds have been tested statewide. People are encouraged to report dead birds, especially crows, jays, magpies, and ravens, using the [Department of Health’s online dead bird reporting system](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html>).

“We’re thankful for the work of our community partners and residents that help us monitor for West Nile virus around the region,” said Bruce Perkins, environmental health director with Benton-Franklin Health District. “While monitoring is important, preventing human cases ultimately requires that we all take steps to prevent mosquito bites when we’re outside and limit mosquito habitats around our homes.”

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People should avoid mosquito bites by staying indoors around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active, ensure door and window screens are working, and use a mosquito repellent when necessary. Always follow label directions when using repellents.

It's also important to reduce mosquito habitat around the home. Emptying water from old tires; turning over old buckets or cans; and frequently changing water in pet dishes, birdbaths, and water troughs helps eliminate the small puddles of water in which many mosquito larvae grow.

West Nile virus can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the spinal cord and brain). People over age 50 have the highest risk for serious illness. There's no specific treatment for West Nile virus infection.

More information on [West Nile virus](http://www.doh.wa.gov/WNV) (www.doh.wa.gov/WNV) is on the Department of Health Web site.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for a healthy dose of information.
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